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May 16, 1969

CIA Memorandum "Soviet Military Resistance to Strategic Arms Talks Increases"

We have reviewed this study and much of the material on which it is based, and we have major problems with it as a piece of analysis. Because of the importance of the subject, and the fact that US tactics on the SALT issue are presently in the formative stage, I am circulating this RSE Memorandum, which takes issue with the judgments and methodology of the CIA paper.

The hypothesis that the military have opposed Soviet disarmament policy has often been suggested -- sometimes by Soviet sources -- in the past. Moreover, we would be inclined to believe that by and large the Soviet military (and perhaps many civilian officials too) would tend to be suspicious about disarmament talks (although, contrariwise, one can adduce a desire for more funds to improve general purpose forces as a possible motive for some non-missile generals to want limitation of strategic armaments). But what is at issue here is the question of whether the degree of military opposition at any given point in time -- and above all, just now -- can be documented precisely enough to provide a sound basis for US decision makers to adjust policy and tactics on SALT questions.

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In contradistinction to the CIA view, we believe that there is no persuasive evidence to support the CIA hypothesis that an anti-SALT campaign by the top Soviet military leadership has reached a new peak of intensity. About two-thirds (almost 8 of 12 pages) of the Memorandum endeavors to prove the military's opposition to strategic arms control by arguing that military spokesmen have revived the discarded (by Khrushchev in 1956) Leninist-Stalinist thesis that war with the West is inevitable. That this is the military contention is stated categorically several times, without any reservation, in both the summary and text of the Memorandum.

However, this is simply not the case. The Memorandum itself does not prove this point, and the texts of the cited materials available to us indicate the contrary. Indeed, the military seem very much to be following the same general line on these matters that the civilian chiefs have followed for years, and, as our comments note, there has recently been a very strong and authoritative reiteration of the primacy of the Party over the military. The Memorandum's shortcomings on doctrinal issues stem, in our opinion, from misinterpretation of the source materials and from confusion as to what the Party line has been on the issues in question.

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The Party Line. First of all, the Party line on non-inevitability of war as embodied in the statements of Soviet leaders and, most importantly, in official Party documents has remained fairly constant since Khrushchev first enunciated it and obtained its acceptance in Party documents at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. Khrushchev told the Congress that "as is known, there is a Marxist-Leninist proposition that while imperialism exists wars are inevitable." However, he noted that world conditions had changed, especially the increased strength of the communist world, and concluded that: "In these conditions, of course, the Leninist proposition remains in force that since imperialism exists the economic basis for the outbreak of wars is also maintained. That is why we must observe the greatest vigilance. While capitalism remains on the earth the reactionary forces representing the interests of capitalist monopolies, will continue in the future to attempt military adventures and aggression, and may try to unleash war. But there is no fatal inevitability of war. Now there are powerful public and political forces, which possess serious means to prevent the unleashing of war by the imperialists, and if they try to start war, to give a shattering rebuff to the aggressors, to foil their adventurous plans."

The major themes subsequently developed have been: (1) world war is not inevitable and can be prevented, but (2) it can happen, and (3) no matter how ruinous the consequences, (4) the communist side will win and capitalism will go. Thus, the resolution of the 21st Party Congress in 1959 asserted that: "The conclusion drawn by the 20th Party Congress to the effect that there is no fatal inevitability of war has proved to be perfectly justified....An aggression of imperialist states against the socialist camp can have just one outcome -- the fall of capitalism....However, at present the possibility that the imperialists might start a war exists, and the threat of war must not be underestimated." The Communist Party "Program" adopted by that congress, and still accepted today including by the military (see below), asserted that the world's peace-loving forces "can prevent a world war" (italics in the original), adding the traditional caveat that "if the imperialist aggressors all the same dare to unleash a new world war, the people will no longer tolerate the system which hurls them into destructive wars. They will sweep imperialism away and bury it." The post-Khrushchev 23rd Party Congress, held in March-April 1966, repeated almost verbatim in its resolution Party leader Brezhnev's remarks to the effect that "our Party is convinced of the correctness of the conclusion of the international communist movement about the possibility of bridling the aggressor, of preventing a new world war."

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While the gloomy side of a nuclear war's consequences has been played down by the post-Khrushchev regime (and we emphasize the regime, not just the military), the theme has not disappeared from view. Speaking at the Party's 50th anniversary ceremonies in November 1967, Party leader Brezhnev called for heightened vigilance toward imperialist provocations "since under modern conditions, a world war employing nuclear missile weaponry could lead to the destruction of hundreds of millions of people, to the destruction of entire countries, to the contamination of the earth's surface and atmosphere."

We are unaware of the reiteration by any Soviet regime spokesman, high or low, civilian or military, of the Leninist-Stalinist inevitability-of-war thesis. Nor, with one exception, do we know of any rejection of the thesis that should a world nuclear war break out the communists would survive and win it, although this hard-line theme for obvious reasons is not repeated on all occasions. The significant exception was Premier Malenkov's statement on March 12, 1954, that in modern conditions a world war "would mean the destruction of world civilization." However, this statement and its implications were almost immediately rebutted by both Khrushchev and by Malenkov himself, both of whom in speeches in April of that year reverted to the standard line that a new war would bring the "collapse of the whole capitalist system." After Malenkov's disgrace and ouster in February 1955 Molotov specifically attacked the Malenkov thesis (but not its author), asserting that "not world civilization" but "imperialism" would be destroyed in a new war.

The Memorandum's Interpretation. As is clear from even the foregoing brief exegesis, communist doctrine on the war issue contains both "hard" and "soft" elements, which can be and are given different emphasis according to the intention of the spokesman and the political climate of the time. However, we find that the CIA Memorandum not only errs in what it chooses to call the "Party line," but also plays rather freely with quotations, choosing a "hard" one but ignoring a "soft" one when present. A few examples:

One whole page (4-5) is devoted to a Bochkarev article, which is alleged to introduce a new Party line and for this reason is cited as "the first concrete evidence of military dissatisfaction with the government proposal to enter strategic arms limitations talks with the US." (p. 6) Bochkarev's new Party line is stated to be (p. 5) his assertion that "if imperialism plunges mankind into nuclear war, it [imperialism] will perish, but not 'both sides!'" The Memorandum's deduction from this statement is: "Bochkarev's interpretation is sharply divergent from the Party line, as set forth in formal CPSU

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documents, that nuclear war would be mutually destructive." But Bochkarev was actually quoting from the 21st Party Congress' Program (see above) on the outcome of a nuclear war! And neither it nor other "formal CPSU documents" say that war would be "mutually destructive."

Some Party statements still do refer to the awful consequences of a nuclear war (see Brezhnev above), but not in such a way as to deny the possibility of communist victory. And so did Mr. Bochkarev: In the same sentence noted above (which was quoted only in part by the CIA Memorandum), Bochkarev concluded the sentence following on from "both sides" with the statement that "although even the socialist countries would be confronted with tremendous suffering and sustain huge losses." Finally, a word on the nature of the Bochkarev article: it was polemicizing with a philosophical article which did violate the Party line in both letter and spirit by asserting that a nuclear war would mean "suicide for both sides." Bochkarev is thus firmly in step with the political leadership, which has made concerted efforts to eradicate the doctrinal meanderings of the Malenkov/Khrushchev era that were considered debilitating to morale and a communist world outlook, especially in the armed forces. But he can hardly be said to provide the "first concrete evidence" of the Soviet military's opposition to strategic arms control talks with the US.

Other Military Commentaries. Other misinterpretations of Soviet military commentaries in the CIA Memorandum are not so flagrant, but they are still, in our opinion, serious. For example, the Memorandum works up to "Stage Three" of alleged military opposition, asserted to have taken place after renewal of the Soviet proposal for strategic arms control talks to the Nixon administration. Here (pp. 7-8) the Memorandum asserts Defense Minister Grechko (and Bochkarev in another article not available to us) revived the Leninist inevitability-of-war thesis in his Kommunist article because he quoted Lenin to the effect that socialism's initial victories "must provoke" clashes between imperialists and socialist states, and a communist war in defense of socialism would be a just war. Grechko was using this Leninist quote, along with other historical material, to argue the need for a strong defense posture on the occasion of Soviet Armed Forces Day. However, in his discussion of contemporary conditions he implied that Soviet military readiness and weaponry were in a satisfactory state. Furthermore, at the end of the article he reiterated the non-inevitability-of-war doctrine, asserting that the Warsaw Pact's present military/economic might "is a powerful factor for restraining aggression, for preventing a new world war."

Armed Forces political commissar General Yepishev is also said (p. 8) to have "revived the 'inevitability' thesis" in an April 1969

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Kommunist article. Actually, Yepishev had nothing to say about the subject beyond reiterating the communists' right to resist if the imperialists "succeed" in unleashing a war. He even stopped short of claiming an inevitable communist victory. The key message of his article was on political indoctrination and Party control methods taken in the armed forces to raise morale and discipline -- which is probably the major objective of most of the military themes the CIA Memorandum interprets as opposition to arms diplomacy.

We have the same sort of problems with the quotations, and interpretations given them, in the other military commentaries cited.

Disarmament Issues in the Military Press. The effort in the Memorandum (p. 6) to find evidence of resistance to the regime's policy on disarmament in the military press is mostly material which OSR had published earlier, and which we and others in the intelligence community found unpersuasive. In general, Red Star does not devote as much space to general political issues as, for example, Pravda or Izvestiya, and by and large absence of specific endorsements for standing Soviet policy lines on disarmament -- in the absence of the start of strategic arms talks, there has not been much news to report -- does not really afford evidence of military opposition to the talks. Red Star's omissions from a Gromyko speech were attributed to TASS, and as such were not necessarily a military opinion. The alteration of the Nazurov speech was done in all of the Soviet press and, again, is not to be taken as an expression of a military viewpoint. (The fact that the deleted passage was somewhat acerbic in its suggestion that the Americans were delaying matters seems to indicate that the change was intended to have the opposite political effect from the one suggested in the paper.)

Military Infighting. We have taken issue earlier with CIA/OSR on the dispute they profess to see in this section (pp. 9-11) between advocates of strategic and conventional forces. We find the article by Bondarenko cited in the paper (pp. 9-10) somewhat less polemical than the CIA paper suggests. It does not advocate strategic weapons at the expense of conventional forces, but rather points to the necessity of having the wherewithal for both types of warfare.

Differing interpretations aside, the representatives of various armed forces branches -- such as former strategic rocket forces Marshal Moskalenko, cited on p. 10 -- almost invariably speak up for their service interests. The question is whether this natural pride of service reaches the stage of a polemic. We feel that the material cited by the Memorandum does not offer convincing proof of a polemic of any consequence in the armed forces on the question of a balanced force structure -- an issue that has appeared pretty well settled since Khrushchev's day, although it could come unstuck and particularly at the present time.

Even less does the material and analysis offered by the Memorandum support its major conclusion (p. 11) that the Soviet military is now arguing "against a comprehensive strategic arms limitation agreement with the US."